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AUTHOR	Runyon, Darla; Von Holzen, Roger
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ABSTRACT

Three Missouri state institutions (Lincoln University, Northwest Missouri State University, and Southeast Missouri State University) have joined forces to develop a cooperative online Masters in Education in Teaching and Learning: Elementary degree. This presentation focuses on the mechanics behind the development and delivery of this unique program. Additional topics covered include: shared courses, program marketing, financial considerations, common tuition policies, drop/add procedures, and the cooperative training of online faculty. (Author/MES)

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Developing a Cooperative Online Degree Programs- The Practical Mechanics

By: Darla Runyon & Roger Von Holzen

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2003 Conference Proceedings

Developing a Cooperative Online Degree Programs-The Practical Mechanics

By: Darla Runyon, Roger Von Holzen
Track 3 - Shaping a Transformative Learning Environment
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Abstract

Three Missouri state institutions-Lincoln University, Northwest Missouri State University, and Southeast Missouri State University-have joined forces to develop a cooperative online Masters in Education in Teaching and Learning: Elementary degree.

This presentation will focus on the mechanics behind the development and delivery of this unique program. Additional topics that will be covered are shared courses, program marketing, financial considerations, common tuition policies, drop/add procedures, and the cooperative training of online faculty.

Proceeding

Three Missouri state institutions—Lincoln University, Northwest Missouri State University, and Southeast Missouri State University—have joined forces to develop a cooperative online Masters of Education in Teaching and Learning: Elementary degree. This thirty-three hour program is designed to meet the special needs of elementary teachers who are in their early career years. The design of this proposed 33-hour program targets those who wish to pursue graduate programming but are limited due to their geographic location, work requirements and other responsibilities.

Two major goals of the program are to assist these teachers to improve their

practice and to fully equip them to persist in the profession, which is critical during this time of significant teacher shortages. A third goal of the program is to enable the participating institutions to offer a new online degree program while minimizing staffing issues. This is achieved through the cooperative sharing of program courses (each campus will teach at least five of the program's courses) and through the centralization of specific student support services (such as registration, drop/add, technical support and course delivery).

University faculty from across the state of Missouri met over a three-year period to develop the program's curriculum. It is based around the work of the National Board for Professional Teaching standards. The program includes a twelve-hour core of education coursework. In addition, the student selects one of three emphasis area options: reading, math or science. The student must also complete the introductory course in both of the options not selected. Finally, three hours of elective course(s) must be taken to round out the program.

This cooperative program features a comprehensive web site (www.MOHEC.org) providing information regarding the program. Beyond providing linked web pages to the graduate school application forms for each institution (based on common application requirements), the web site provides information regarding program costs, registration processes and procedures, and access to the online courses.

Students interested in this program are assigned to either the reading strand cohort or the math/science cohort. In order to ensure sufficient enrollments in the program's courses for each of the areas, students are proceed through the program on a strand-specific cohort basis. Students in the reading strand cohort begin taking courses during the summer session, while the math/science strand cohort begin taking classes in the program during the fall semester. With either cohort, they are expected to enroll in the course(s) offered during the semester that is associated with their area of emphasis (reading, math or science). Overall, they are expected to progress through this program with their cohort group.

All courses are taught based on a common calendar that falls within the academic calendars for all three campuses (to facilitate grade reporting and faculty time commitments). For example, based on this requirement, the summer 2003 session will run from Wednesday, June 4 through Friday, August 1 and the fall 2003 semester will run Monday, August 25 through Friday, December 12.

The three participating institutions have established common admissions criteria for this program. Note that the program's admissions requirements are higher than those for admission to each institution's graduate school. Admissions criteria recommended include:

- Program admission requires a minimum undergraduate GPA of 3.00
- Alternative admission minimum undergraduate GPA of 2.75 and 3.25 on the first nine hours of graduate coursework in the program
- Graduate record exam: 475 minimum on the verbal or quantitative score and a minimum of 400 on the other score (quantitative or verbal)

- Letter of support from the student's employer (supervisor) if the student works in a school or educational institution
- A cover letter briefly discussing the student's teaching background and the emphasis (cohort) area that the student is interested in (reading, math or science).

Interested students must first be admitted into the program, based on the criteria listed above, by a designated home institution (Lincoln, Northwest or Southeast) following the application procedures for that institution. Returning students who have been out of the program for at least one semester must be readmitted into the program.

Participating faculty must qualify as graduate faculty at their respective home institutions. Each institution has responsibility for the employment decisions, work assignments, annual work evaluations, and termination decisions for its participating faculty. Faculty accepted as graduate faculty by one of the participating institutions is also accepted by the other participating universities.

Upon admission into the program by one of the participating institutions, the student's home institution is assigned the student an academic advisor. It is the responsibility of each institution to provide advisor contact information to its students.

In order to ensure that students from each institution have equal access to the program's courses, it was decided by the participating institutions to allocate course seats on an equal basis. For example, for most classes an enrollment limit of 21 is set. Therefore, each campus is allowed to enroll up to seven students into the classes.

The course reservation system is web-based and provides wait lists for the courses if more than seven students are interested in enrolling in a course from a member institution. This allows us to maintain high enrollments in the classes. For example, in the event that one institution does not fill its allotted seats, while another institution has more than seven students interested in enrolling in the class, once the enrollment period is closed, students on the wait list are allowed into the course on a first-come-first-serve basis. This also covers the possibility of students withdrawing from a class before it starts.

One week (seven days) before class starts, the reservation requests are sent on to the institutions (in a format designated by each registrar's office) so that the students can be formally enrolled in their courses at their home institutions. The web site also handle all adds, drops and withdrawals, which are reported to each campus on a regular/daily basis in a format selected by each campus.

Any costs associated with late adds may be assessed by the student's home institution. If a student decides to drop a course or to withdraw from a course or the program, the drop/withdrawal and refund policies of the student's home institution is enforced.

Students enrolled in courses that are part of the cooperative online Masters of Education in Teaching and Learning: Elementary degree program are billed by their home institution. Beyond the base tuition charge, the student may also be assessed any additional fees (such as a technology fee) and surcharges that are normally applied by the student's home institution. The student is then responsible to pay in full to his/her home institution under that institution's guidelines and policies.

On the sixth day of the summer session or the eleventh day of the fall session, the Program Director conducts a course census. The Director then bills each institution for the number of students enrolled in each of the program's courses at the rate of $200 per credit hour per student. For example, if seven Northwest students are enrolled in a three-hour course and a two-hour course, Northwest will be billed for a total of $7,000 (see below).

$$7 * 3 * \$200 + 7 * 2 * \$200 = \$4,200 + \$2,800 = \$7,000$$

Students who encounter any technical problems associated with their cooperative online Masters of Education in Teaching and Learning: Elementary degree program courses are able to obtain help from the MOHEC help desk. This help desk is available seven days a week, 24 hours a day via either e-mail or by phone.

Standard letter grades (A, B, C, D, and F) are utilized by the instructors participating in the cooperative online Masters of Education in Teaching and Learning: Elementary degree program. For any drops or withdrawals, each campus utilizes its own policies and lettering system for reporting on the students' transcripts.

A secured web site has been developed to enable faculty members to record their course grades. That information is then be made available to each campus's registrar's office. Only a student's home institution is be able to view that student's grades. Submissions of grades to the registrar's office on each campus are made in the format as designated by each office (direct viewing and printing of grade reports, download of files containing grade reports, or e-mail receipt of grade reports).

This paper has focused on the mechanics behind the development and delivery of this unique online cooperative masters degree program. It is an evolving process that has posed an interesting challenge to all of the institutions involved. It has provided the institutions with new insight as to how better serve the diverse needs of their students through learning how other institutions approach similar issues and how greater flexibility is needed to face the challenges of today's educational

environment.

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